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SUBJECT: ARMENIA GETS FIRST FEMALE GOVERNOR, YET GOAM REMAINS HIGHLY  
GENDER IMBALANCED

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

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SUMMARY  
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11. (SBU) On July 11 the GOAM appointed Armenia's first ever female governor to run the region of Shirak; despite this unexpected move, Armenian executive and legislative bodies remain starkly underrepresented by women. END SUMMARY.

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A FEMALE GOVERNOR!  
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12. (SBU) In handing out one of ten governorships this week, the new Cabinet appointed Lida Nanyan, 59, to run the northwestern region of Shirak, home to Armenia's second largest city, Gyumri. Prior to this appointment, Nanyan served as head of the region's Tax authority, and her family is reported to have large business interests in the region and close ties with the Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. The Republican Party endorsed Nanyan's candidacy though her official stance is non-partisan.

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THE GOAM'S GENDER GAP  
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13. (SBU) Despite this unexpected appointment, Armenian executive and legislative bodies remain strictly understaffed with women. Of the 18 members of the new Cabinet, only three deputy-ministers and the Minister of Culture are women. The May 12 Parliamentary elections somewhat boosted the presence of women in the Parliament, up from 7 to 12; however, this still constitutes only a small fraction percentage (9.1) of the 131-member legislature. Moreover, all of these women came to power via party lists; none were elected through single-mandate constituencies.

14. (SBU) An interesting female parliamentarian -- who in many ways is the exception that proves the rule -- is Hranoush Hakobyan. Republican party leaders persuaded the veteran MP from Gavar to trade in her single mandate seat for a high position on the party list for the May elections. In the new Parliament, the nominally non-partisan Hakobyan chairs the Science and Education Committee and in the past has been active on women's health and trafficking issues.

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COMMENT: IT'S UP TO THEM  
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15. (SBU) With the current state of Armenia's money-driven and

male-dominated political sphere, women politicians face an uphill battle to be recognized and to achieve the clout necessary to play a significant part in the game of Armenian politics. As a result, with the possible exception of Hakobyan, most pro-governmental female parliamentarians are generally viewed as token quota-fillers, who keep a low-profile and who do not seek to be activists or even role models for women's rights. In contrast to their female colleagues on the pro-governmental side of the chamber, a number of active and outspoken women -- including Armenia's first ombudswoman, Larisa Alaverdyan -- now sit in Parliament on the opposition side representing the Heritage Party. These women have the potential to change the image of the female politician for the better. Despite Lida Nanyan's position in Shirak, it more likely will be these Heritage Party women in Parliament who will have more to say about the future role of women in Armenia than the new governor.

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